**American Civics: The Story of All of Us**

Washington Latin Public Charter School

2015-2016

Lawrence Staten

*''People should not be afraid of their government.*

*Government should be afraid of their people.”*

-*V for Vendetta*

The United States is hailed by many as the greatest country to ever exist on the face of the Earth. The strength and greatness of the United States comes from the strength and greatness of our constitutional republic. It is so important to the future of our great republic that our citizens know what it means to be an American, where we come from, and the legacy that has been left to us by the entire western world. The most dangerous citizen in America is an educated citizen: one who understands their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the nation President Lincoln called "the last, best hope of the world." In the United States, over half of the country does not know its history or how its government works. They do not know their rights as Americans. They do not know how their country operates, nor do they understand the legacy and history of their country. Consider these four simple facts:

1. There are 435 members of the United States House of Representatives
2. There are 100 members of the United States Senate
3. There are 9 members of the United States Supreme Court
4. The political party that ***currently*** controls a majority of the United States Government is the Republican Party.

According to the Center for the Study of the American Dream at Xavier University, knowing those four simple facts makes you more informed than 51% of the natural-born citizens of the United States. To put that in perspective, 129,085,403 people voted in the 2012 United States presidential election. The four facts you just learned, in the first minutes of the first day of the first class, makes you smarter and more informed about the United States government than 65 million people.

American Civics will give you the knowledge and skills to not only understand history and government, but to think about history and to analyze government with a critical eye. The skills we practice and learn in this class will serve you well in your thinking about current events and your world today. In the end, history is a story. It is the story of people, of events, and ideas. It is the story of literature, religion, music, art, science, mathematics, technology, weapons, and war. There are epic tales of battles and exploration, tales of courage and valor, triumph and tragedy. There are stories of adventure, sacrifice, and ordinary men and women, who, in the right circumstance, end up accomplishing extraordinary things that changed the world. You will become articulate, clear, concise, and critical storytellers. You will become citizens who know their rights, responsibilities, and privileges as Americans and, more importantly, the legacy that you have inherited from the entire western world that composes the story of all of us. You will join the ranks of the most dangerous citizens in America.

Our national story and who we are as a people does not begin with our Constitution, nor does it even begin on the battlefields of the American Revolution. The idea that became the United States has been debated, questioned, challenged and fought over not only since the founding of this nation, but it is also an idea that is older than America. From the moment civilization first appeared in the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia, through the battles for democracy between Greece and Persia, and the fight for the empire and glory of Rome; every step up the ladder of science, every masterpiece of the Renaissance, and every voyage of discovery, from Columbus to the first heroic step upon the Moon, has been dedicated to this idea: you are not what you were born; you are what you have it in you to be.

**What We Will Study (The Big Picture):**

Civics is defined as the study of the rights and responsibilities of being citizens of the United States. However, our course encompasses so much more than this. Understanding where your rights come from, and how they were earned is equally important. The story of western civilization is the story of how peoples and nations moved from tyranny and absolute monarchy to the liberty of democracy and republicanism. By the end of this course in American Civics, all scholars will be able to identify and summarize their rights as citizens of the United States. Students will achieve this by building an interactive notebook that will support them as a resource throughout their academic career in the history curriculum of Washington Latin. Over the course of the year, we will answer three essential questions:

* 1. **What are your natural rights as Americans and where do they come from?**
  2. **Should people be afraid of their government or should government be afraid of their people?**
  3. **What nations and peoples led to and influenced the creation and growth of the United States?**

To answer these essential questions, American Civics can be divided into two halves. In the first semester, we will explore the development of western civilization through the lens of politics and government. Much of this material will prepare you for the world history courses at Washington Latin. Our world history chapters are as follows:

**Chapter One: The Age of the Lawgivers** (3200 BC-700 BC: The Universe, Earth, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and Persia)

**Chapter Two: The Age of Empires** (700 BC-AD 500: Greece and Rome)

**Chapter Three: The Age of Kings** (AD 500-1400: The Byzantine Empire and the Medieval World)

**Chapter Four: Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth** (1400-1600: The Renaissance and Reformation, the Age of Discovery, the Scientific Revolution, and the Age of the Enlightenment)

**Chapter Five: Brave New World** (1600-1763: The Rise of the British Empire and the making of British Colonial America).

In the second semester, we will study the United States Constitution and the development of the United States as a constitutional federal republic. This year, you will have the unique privilege of studying American Government and the Constitution during the Democratic and Republican presidential primary campaigns. These chapters are designed to prepare you for the American history courses here at Washington Latin. Our American history chapters are:

**Chapter Six: The War for Independence** (1763-1789)

**Chapter Seven: We the People - The United States Constitution**

**Chapter Eight: The Empire of Liberty** (1789-1824)

**Chapter Nine: Andrew Jackson and America’s Manifest Destiny** (1824-1850).

At the conclusion of each chapter and/or quarter you can expect a test or exam covering the material for the previous chapter or quarter. All tests and exams will be announced a minimum of five school days (seven calendar days or one week) before test day. This will give you ample time (including at least one weekend) to review, ask questions, and to prepare for the exam. It is the policy of this class to not offer retakes on quizzes or tests. Formal quizzes, given at the discretion of the teacher, will be announced at least two days beforehand. Informal quizzes, also given at the discretion of the teacher, can happen at any time.

At the conclusion of the year, traditionally the third or fourth week of May, scholars will take the United States Constitution Exam. Passing this exam with a grade of 70% or higher is one of the requirements that must be met in order for promotion to seventh grade. This exam is designed to test your knowledge of concepts, skills, and ideas you will learn about the United States Constitution and American government and how you apply those skills through constitutional interpretation. Every exam we take beforehand will be designed to train you for this final so that you will not only pass the exam, but excel and display mastery of what we will learn.

**It is Not the Destination that Matters; it is the Journey**

This class covers a lot of ground; five thousand years of western civilization and history. Many times, you will find that the material and concepts we discuss in Civics will overlap with what you are learning in other classes, particularly Latin and English, and sometimes Theatre, Science, and Mathematics. This is done intentionally and is called *cross-curricular education*, where something you learn in one class helps or supports what you’re learning in another class. Cross-curricular teaching helps reinforce the concepts and ideas you learn in both classes. In addition, we are endeavoring to build a virtual classroom, where learning is no longer confined to the four walls of the classroom and the fifty minutes per day we meet. Education is an investment. As such, there are multiple opportunities for you to learn outside of class.

***It is vitally important to your success in this class that you take the initiative and make use of these resources which include PowerSchool and the WikiSpace (which you agreed to as part of your decision to attend this school)*. *In addition to the wiki, other resources include, but are not limited to, the class Facebook page (Facebook.com/AmericanCivicsClassroom), and the class page on icivics.org.***

In addition to these resources, the use of technology has become vital to success in education. American Civics relies heavily upon technology and films to supplement learning, which includes documentaries and films from the History Channel. In previous years, we have watched films and documentaries such as *Mankind: The Story of All of Us, Horrible Histories, Egypt: Engineering an Empire*, *Battles B.C.*, *The Last Stand of the 300*, *The Dark Ages*, *America: The Story of Us, The Crucible, This is America Charlie Brown, The Revolution*, *Schoolhouse Rock*, *1776: The Musical*, *The Presidents*, *Liberty’s Kids*, *John Adams*, *First Invasion: The War of 1812*, *Andrew Jackson*, and *The Mexican-American War*. This year, we proudly add *Engineering an Empire: The Series,* *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, and *The Ultimate Guide to the Presidents* asnew resources we will use.We will also make regular use of BrainPop, apps that can be found on iTunes, and other online free resources, including CNN Student News, to stay apprised of current events in our nation and our world. **It is imperative that you remember that watching documentaries and films in this class is a privilege. This privilege is based upon your professionalism and engagement in class.**

**My Expectations**

Washington Latin is a college preparatory school, and as such, this class will be conducted as a college preparatory class. By the end of this course, you will be able to hold your own and excel in a freshman/sophomore year World History, American History, American Government, and Political Science class at the collegiate level. The reason for this is simple: I will push you. **I do not expect perfection; I will, however, demand excellence.** This class will be rigorous, and it will be challenging, but it will be rewarding. The best things in life must be fought and sacrificed for. A’s in this class are not given, they are earned. If you take ownership of this class, and take pride in it, then great shall be your reward. **It is expected that you will meet basic Washington Latin standards for excellence. It is expected that you will be prepared, respectful, engaged, and professional during ALL classes. I will push you further. The following are the expectations for being prepared, respectful, engaged, and professional in this class.**

**Prepared: Scholars will have homework completed, and materials (interactive notebook, binder, pencils/pens, highlighters, scotch tape, etc.) ready for every day of class. Scholars will come to class ready to not only learn, but ready to be taught.**

**Respectful: Scholars will be civil and polite from the moment they arrive at school until the moment they depart. They will refrain from behavior that will be a detriment to their own education, the education of others, and the peace of the academic environment.**

**Engaged: Scholars will be prepared for class discussions and debates, ready to engage with germane (relevant) questions and comments, and be an active, positive participant and citizen in our class and school.**

**Professional: Scholars will be in uniform, respectfully quiet in the hallways, prepared to accept responsibility for their actions, and willing to hold themselves, and each other, accountable for their decisions and their choices. Scholars will speak in the Queen’s English, using complete sentences, at all times in class.**

This class will be conducted not only under the guidelines established by Washington Latin, but also under the guidelines of Parliamentary Procedure. Parliamentary Procedure is one of history’s great traditions and is respected by governments all over the world, including the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, as well as the Senate of the United States. We will practice this discipline and model it for each other so visitors who come to our class will see excellence in action.

**On Initiative**

Initiative is defined as the introductory step; the energy or aptitude displayed in the beginning of action. To display initiative is to take action on one’s own, independent of outside action or control. To be successful in American Civics, you will have to rely upon your own initiative and be responsible for your own actions and your own education. If you are willing to take the basic steps toward success on your own, and meet the basic responsibilities of being a student, then we can, and will, accomplish great things together.

A quarter grade is calculated through the following percentages: Homework (25%), Quizzes (20%), Projects (20%), Tests (25%), and Classwork/Participation (10%). **Washington Latin school policy is that late homework is an automatic zero. However, if you take the initiative, and come speak to me about any difficulties you are having BEFORE a due date, then I am more than happy to help you find a way to be successful.** If you are willing to take the first step and invest in your own education, I will carry you the rest of the way.

**The Interactive Notebook**

There is no definitive textbook for American Civics; this is due, in part, to the fact that this class is the most unique educational experience offered at Washington Latin. As part of this experience, you will build your own textbook through an interactive notebook. An interactive notebook is a customizable, personal record of your journey through this class and through history. It will serve as a means of organizing and guiding you as well as an outlet for the free expression of your thoughts and ideas. It will serve as a guidebook for the rest of your journey through the history courses at Washington Latin. **You will be expected to have a five-subject notebook to serve as your interactive notebook.** You will also be expected to have a three-ring binder for organizing handouts and readings. You are also expected to have a supply of scotch tape, pencils or pens, and a highlighter.While some supplies can be borrowed from me as your teacher and your fellow students, it is important to bring your interactive notebook, scotch tape, highlighter, and a pencil or pen every day. These materials will be absolutely vital and necessary to your success in this class.

**Office Hours**

The time after school, from 3:25-3:55, Monday through Thursday is dedicated as my office hours. It is sacred time set aside for my students to come explore and learn more about history, current events, and topics in this class that we may not otherwise get to due to time constraints. It is an extension of my class and students will be expected to conduct themselves professionally during office hours. During office hours, students can expect a variety of experiences, such as games, projects, discussions, and documentaries, as well as time to work on quietly on homework and ask questions that will help support and enrich their learning. Outside of baseball season, when I am coaching, it is reasonable to expect that office hours will be held unless it has been announced otherwise. I encourage you to make use of this time so that you receive the full experience of American Civics.

**The Empire of Dreams: A Personal Note**

***We are here to build an Empire of Dreams: a place where excellence is expected and what is average for you will be excellence in the eyes of the world.*** Our ultimate hope is to be a little bit better today than we were yesterday, but not as good as we will be tomorrow. It is my honor and my privilege to help you succeed. It is my mission to do all in my power to help you be successful. I encourage you to ask questions, and to hold me accountable for your learning. If you are not comfortable discussing your questions in class, feel free to contact me outside of class by way of email or visiting my office hours. I will try, from time to time, to make this class fun, and maybe even entertaining.

Are you ready? Let's rock and roll.